

Carlos Chávez - Conciertos Para Violín y Piano (2001)

Written by bluesever (Bogdan Marszałkowski)

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Concierto Para Violín (28:24) 1 *Largo - Allegro Moderato* 7:47 2 *Largo* 5:22 3 *Scherzo* 1:59 4 *Cadenza* 3:34 5 *Tempo Primo (Scherzo)* 1:38 6 *Largo* 4:36 7 *Allegro Moderato* 2:45 8 *Largo* 2:43 *Concierto Para Piano (36:01)* 9 *Largo Non Troppo - Allegro Agitato* 19:52 10 *Molto Lento (Attaca)* 9:08 11 *Finale: Allegro Non Troppo* 7:01 Violin – Pablo Roberto Diemecke Piano – Jorge Federico Osorio Orquesta Sinfónica Nacional Conductor – Enrique Arturo Diemecke

Carlos Chavez has had both the honor and the curse of being branded Mexico's greatest composer; an honor because it is undoubtedly true, but a curse in this most international of composers has ended up relegated to a Latin-American concert "ghetto". Though the composer was very rarely overtly "Mexican" in the same way that countrymen Reveultas and Ponce were, his work has met a similar fate, championed by Mexican and Latin musicians but never taken up by international orchestras. This is a shame, because this outstanding music deserves support by the most accomplished of performers. The present CD is a case in point. The works on the CD were previously unknown to me and they are stunning. The Violin Concerto is a work that dates from the 40s and shows Chavez's twin nature as both a modernist and a romantic. The language of the concerto is a lovely mixture of modal melody, harmony based on fourths and fifths, and occasional pounding dissonance, but always in a tonal context. The form of the concerto is unique in the repertoire, I believe. The almost 40 minute work is presented in seven movements without a break and in arch form. The piece begins with a stately lyrical introduction, at once austere and warm, if such a paradox can be contemplated. The work then speeds up with an allegro toccata, with plenty of virtuoso work for the soloist. The first slow movement darkens considerably; this is a moving ostinato for orchestra over which the violin plays increasingly passionate lines. This moves into a very light-hearted scherzo and then to a substantial 4-minute violin cadenza, which occupies the heart of the concerto. Rather than a traditional climactic function, this cadenza is almost another lyric movement, the passagework being subordinated to the development of many of the thematic ideas of the symphony. Then the work proceeds down the backside of the arch, with new movements mirroring the original movements: scherzo, slow movement, allegro and then finally concluding with a beautiful contemplative, slow coda. This latter effect was criticized by none other than Leonard Bernstein as not exciting enough, but in the context of the elegant arch form I find the ending haunting. If the Violin Concerto is an impressive work, the Piano Concerto of the late 30s is a masterpiece. Written in three massive movements, this work out-Bartok's Bartok in percussive force. The musical idiom is again modal, though spiked with biting dissonances all through. In fact, this

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work was initially considered a failure at its New York premiere, partly because of its unrelenting percussive nature. Time has softened our ears for such music, and the Concerto reveals itself to be a masterpiece of energy, brilliant writing for both soloist and orchestra. The formal devices of the concerto are not as novel as the Violin concerto. The first movement is a sonic tour de force, a brittle Allegro that resembles nothing so much as the Bartok 1st piano concerto. The second movement is nothing short of brilliant. It's long-lined arching melodies build to a stunning climactic section, where a short motive is traded over and over between piano and orchestra, building up a granite wall of sound. The final movement resorts again to the brittle style of the first movement, but is full of high spirits and drives the concerto to a rollicking conclusion. While the music on this disc is of superior character, unfortunately some of the performances don't quite match the character of the music. Both concerti were recorded at a concert in celebration of the centenary of the composer, so there is an air of occasion in the recording, and in general, the sound is remarkably clean for a live recording. The orchestra is quite accomplished and well balanced under the baton of Enrique Diemecke. Pianist, Jorge Frederico Orsorio is brilliant, and, except for a few moments of questionable ensemble playing between soloist and orchestra, the Piano Concerto is brilliantly played. Unfortunately the same cannot be said for the playing of elder Diemecke brother, Pablo, as the violin soloist. His tone is thin, his marcato playing during the allegro movements and his intonation are often faulty. He often rushes his virtuoso passages, as if they are barely under control, and as a result, there are many moments of sloppy ensemble that distract from the impact of this wonderful piece of music. So, while this music is a must hear..absolutely, be warned. It is not a perfect recording, despite it's Grammy credentials. But as this is the only available recording of these works, and may be so for the foreseeable future, it is still a CD to own and a great introduction to this marvelous modern master, unfortunately still too little known outside his home country. May the fame of this recording inspire a major rediscovery of this composer. ---Christopher Forbes, amazon.com

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